



## Fine Asian Works of Art (505)

Wed, 8th Nov 2017, London

### Lot 87

**Estimate:** £20000 - £30000 + Fees

#### **ZHANG DAQIAN (1899-1983) SCHOLAR UNDER WILLOW TREE, 1944**

ink and colour on paper, signed Zhang Daqian, dated the thirty-third year of the Republic Period (1944), with two seals of the artist 'Zhang Yuan' and 'San Qian Da Qian', with dedication reading 'Presented to Mr James K. Penfield (Chinese name Pan Feilu), who called on me twice at Da Feng Hall while I was out, as a token for his return to the United States'

77x43cm (sight)

#### Provenance:

From the collection of the late James Kedzie Penfield (1908-2004), who joined the American Diplomatic Corps to China in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1954, Penfield became United States' High Commissioner for Austria with the mission to re-establish an independent, neutral and democratic Austria. In 1961, he was appointed American Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Iceland; thence by direct family descent.

#### To The Parting Friend

Beneath the cascading branches of a willow tree, a scholar is moving into an indefinite distance, his robes draped to the ground, his head slightly turned back and casting a thoughtful glance, as if remembering something he has left behind - This painting is a farewell present by Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), one of the most celebrated 20th century Chinese artists, to James Kedzie Penfield (1908-2004), a young American diplomat and personal friend of his. "Mr Penfield called on me twice at Da Feng Hall studio while I was out. This is a token for his return to the United States", reads the dedication on the painting.

James was born in NYC in 1908. His mother was one of the first women to drive a car by herself all the way across the United States within a week. James must have inherited her pioneering spirit, because as a young Stanford graduate, he joined the small hand-picked team who travelled to China to work for the American Diplomatic Corps in the 1930s and 1940s. Although his diplomatic career later took him to posts all around the world, his daughter remembers him speaking fondly of "the best years of his life in Peking, Canton and Chunking". Whilst in China, James' inquiring and adventurous spirit took him to conversations and friendships with prominent local artists, such as Zhang Daqian. Although not much detail of their friendship is known, the painting bears witness that it is with sadness the two parted. In the image of the scholar torn between leaving and lingering, Zhang Daqian has projected either himself or his American friend, or them both.

The painting is dated 1944, when Zhang has just returned to Shanghai from a two-year trip to the Dunhuang Grottos in West China. The study of ancient Buddhist murals

transformed his Shitao and Badashanren-inspired literati style to a colour-intensive and sumptuous one, before developing the expressive splashed-ink technique for which he is most well-known. In the present painting, carried out in his early style, Zhang aligns himself with the centuries-old literati tradition of portraying the scholar-recluse, who prefers the retreat into nature to the possession of worldly treasures. Beyond the simple and minimalistic surface, the ease and at the same time certainty with which Zhang carries out the free flow of lines recalls Liang Kai's masterpiece of the poet Li Bai.